

DRAUPADI AND THE GAMBLING MATCH

from the *Maha-Bharata*

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CAST: Narrator, Yudhishtira, Vidura, Bhima, Bhishma, Arjuna, Draupadi, Lord Krishna, Shakuni, Karna, Drona, Duryodhana, Dhritarashtra, Dhrishtadyumna, Dushasana, Servant.

SCENE ONE

Narrator: Many centuries ago, in the land of Bharata, now India, the Kuru dynasty was the most powerful empire, headed by Bhishma, Drona, Dhrishtadyumna and Kripa. Although Maharaja Yudhishtira was the rightful heir to the throne of the Kuru house, due to deceitfulness of their uncle, Dhrishtadyumna, they were mistreated and thrown into exile in a jungle. But by the grace of Lord Krishna, they turned that jungle into a wondrous and mystical city known as Indraprastha. Having completed the building of that city, king Yudhishtira, under the direction of Lord Krishna, performed the great Rajasuya sacrifice, in which all the nearby kings surrendered themselves unto the Supreme King. Duryodhana and his friends were all invited to come. With great envy, Duryodhana toured the new city. At one point he mistook water to be the land and fell in the water, to the great amusement of everyone including Draupadi and the Pandavas.
(laughter of Draupadi. Shakuni enters)

Shakuni: My dear nephew, you seem to be troubled. What seems to be causing your problem?

Duryodhana: Please leave me alone, I do not wish to be disturbed!

Shakuni: Come, come my son, would you tell your uncle □ who is your well wisher □ to go away? Now tell me, what is bothering you?

Duryodhana: Uncle, please, I do not want to discuss it. I just want to be left alone.

Shakuni: Is it the Pandavas who are bothering you? Or is this now wondrous and mystical city disturbing you? Or is the Rajasuya sacrifice that Yudhishtira performed before you the cause of your anxiety?

Duryodhana: Uncle, will you stop teasing me and leave me alone!

Shakuni: Oh, so that's what's disturbing you □ the opulence of the Pandavas in their new city, Indraprastha, is the cause of your envy. You wish you could acquire all that wealth in one big scoop.

Duryodhana: What are you trying to get at, uncle?

Shakuni: I want to see you happy. I want you to be the king. After all, when your father passes away, his world should be yours to rule, not Yudhishtira's. Why don't you just confide in me, then I will certainly help you. With myself

and Karna as your friends, you need not be in unnecessary anxiety, my dearest one.

Duryodhana: Well, alright. Ever since I returned from Indraprastha, I have never known a peaceful day. I haven't eaten. I can't even sleep at night.

Shakuni: Yes.

Duryodhana: The laughter of Draupadi is haunting me like a ghost, and now it won't leave me alone. That laughter just follows me everywhere I go!

Shakuni: So you want to punish her.

Duryodhana: Yes. Just as I was made a fool in front of everyone, I too want to make a fool of Draupadi. But I must fight and defeat the Pandavas before I can do that. Then I can keep Yudhishtira's entire kingdom, which was meant for me in the first place.

Shakuni: Now, that's not an easy task. You have seen how powerful the Pandavas have become. They can never be defeated in a war.

Duryodhana: Then am I to be a pauper and never satisfy my desire?

Shakuni: Now don't jump to conclusions. I have a weapon more powerful and sharper than mere steel. I can make all that immense wealth yours. Not a drop of blood will be shed. Nor will any blame be attached to your name. Come out of this depression and listen to me.

Duryodhana: Is this possible?

Shakuni: Yes. Yudhishtira has one weakness □ he likes to play dice.

Duryodhana: Dice?

Shakuni: Yes, dice. Yudhishtira loves playing this game. But he does not know how to play. On the other hand, I am extremely clever at throwing the dice. There is no one in this world who can play against me and win. I will do what will please you by using this skill of mine □ I will defeat Yudhishtira and win his kingdom for you.

Duryodhana: But what about Draupadi?

Shakuni: I will win her, too. You must be patient. Now you must tell your father and get his permission. It will then be like taking a toy from the hand of a child. But you must get your father's consent.

Duryodhana: Shakuni, you must go to father and get his consent. He will listen to you more than I. He does not consider my values very important. Father is always shielded from me by Vidura.

Shakuni: Alright, I will go to father, and when the time is right I will tell him of your depression.

Duryodhana: That sounds like a good plan. **(Shakuni leaves, enter Dhrishtadyumna)**

Dhrishtadyumna: Duryodhana, my son. Come here... Let me touch you. You are unhappy? What is the cause? If I can do anything to rectify the situation, then please tell me.

Duryodhana: Please listen to the cause of my depression... My heart burns at the opulence of the Pandavas. When the star of the Pandavas is in the ascent, is it hardly surprising that I am unhappy? Do you expect me to sing the praises of those well-behaved children? You seem to be doing absolutely nothing to help me. I hate them! I can't live with them on this planet! I want them destroyed! I want their opulence as my own!

Dhrishtadyumna: My son, how have you allowed yourself to be so carried away by envy? Be peaceful in mind and be happy with what you have.

Duryodhana: Peaceful? Happy? How can I be happy with what I have when the Pandavas have more?!

Dhrishtadyumna: Well then, I will speak to Vidura and see what he has to say.

Duryodhana: No! You never listen to me! You always follow that old fool's advice. Why don't you speak to Karna or Shakuni?

Dhrishtadyumna: Vidura is old and wise. He knows what is best for the both of us.

Shakuni: Yes, it's true. You never take advice from us. We too can instruct you.

Dhrishtadyumna: What do you think?

Shakuni: Well, if all Duryodhana wants is his wealth □ I can acquire that for him easily, and without any bloodshed.

Dhrishtadyumna: How?

Shakuni: All you have to do is to invite Yudhishtira for a game of dice. With my expertise I can win Yudhishtira's kingdom for Duryodhana.

Duryodhana: Excellent idea. Excellent. Yes, father, I think you should invite him.

Dhrishtadyumna: I must consult my ministers first.

Duryodhana: Father, you know full well that they will never agree to this idea. Vidura will never sanction this. If you do not agree, I will kill myself. Then you can be happy with Yudhishtira and Vidura. You need not think of me.

Dhrishtadyumna: All right, I will not ask anyone. Have a beautiful hall built in Jayanta... When it is finished you can call upon the sons of Pandu. Then you can have your game of dice. I leave it in your hands.

SCENE TWO

Bhima: Now our power has grown so much with Maharaja Drupada's allies, and this wondrous city is the talk of the country. Our fame and power is growing day by day. Now it will be very difficult for our cousins to have a war with us.

Yudhishthira: My dear brother, you must not always scorn your brothers.

Bhima: They are not our brothers – they have tried to kill us on several occasions. You still have the audacity to call them our brothers? It is not a secret, my brother, that I long for a battle with the envious snake Duryodhana for all the harm he has done to us. I still wait for that moment. But when it does come, I will be ready.

Yudhishthira: Even if they have done us harm, it is not *dharmic* to seek revenge or to fight with one's brother. We are now happy here. They have given this land of their own free will, so they will not try to take it back from us.

Arjuna: Is that so? Well, let me tell you, brother, that those brothers of ours will not sleep a wink until they see us all killed and deprived of all of our belongings. Do you think they will be satisfied now that we have built this wondrous city?

Bhima: No. That will just burn his body so badly that he will probably catch fire.
(Vidura enters)

Yudhishthira: Oh, Vidura, what a pleasant surprise to see you here. Is all well in the house of Kuru? Is Bhishma well? How is our *guru*, Dronacharya? And our uncle Dhrishtadyumna? Your face does not seem to register any happiness. Are you not well?

Vidura: All is well in our kingdom. I am fine. I have a message from the king.

Bhima: A message from the king? What does he want now?

Vidura: The king has had a beautiful assembly hall built. He wants you to go and spend some time there with him playing dice, enjoying happy times together and healing old wounds.

Arjuna: Hmmm...

Vidura: Why are you silent, my dear uncle?

Yudhishthira: I feel that there is more to this than meets the eye. I have a feeling this game of dice will be the cause of quarrel between the sons of Dhrishtadyumna and us. I am eager to know your opinion, uncle.

Vidura: That is the cause of my unhappiness. I know it is not right to play games. I tried telling my brother, but he would not listen to me.

Bhima: Tell me, who are all these rogues who are planning to join in this game?

Vidura: Shakuni, the evil-minded Duryodhana, and his brothers. These are the opponents you have to face, Yudhishthira.

Yudhishthira: I am inept at this game while Shakuni is expert at throwing the dice. But what can I do? All that happens is ordained by the Lord Himself. I am helpless. The king knows my principles, that I will never disobey the orders of my elders. It is also a rule among *kshatriyas* that one must

play when one is invited to play. Let Lord Krishna guide us. I will make arrangements to leave soon.

Vidura: O my dearest, how much more must you go through before the world can see your righteousness?

SCENE THREE

Duryodhana: So the hour has arrived when all that the Pandavas have will be mine. Father, at last you can be rest assured that your son will be happy.

Karna: I think we should have just gone and marched to Indraprastha and taken over the throne by force. That's the only way to deal with rogues.

Shakuni: Why shed unnecessary blood when it can be avoided? We can still achieve the same result without spilling one drop of blood.

Dhrishtadyumna: I hope what you are saying is true. I have heard enough of this kind of talk to last two lifetimes. The Pandavas should be here soon.
(Pandavas enter)

Yudhishtira: Our respects are unto you, O great king of the Kuru house. Today we have witnessed the glory of the Kurus. The hall you have built is truly astounding.

Dhrishtadyumna: Well, I am pleased that you are happy with our hall and hospitality. How is Draupadi?

Draupadi: I am well, thank you.

Shakuni: Why don't you sit down? You must be very tired from travelling. Bring some refreshments for our guests. How about a game of dice whilst we wait for the refreshments?

Yudhishtira: I wish not to partake in this activity.

Shakuni: Oh come, come, it is only a game. Do not worry. Enjoy yourselves.

Yudhishtira: You do not see my point. This game will result in a quarrel. A wise man becomes a fool after he puts his hand on the dice. Let us avoid this game.

Shakuni: So you are afraid of losing? Maybe you are not ready to lose the wealth you have acquired from the Rajasuya sacrifice. After all, it is new to you. Let him keep it. You need not accept the challenge.

Yudhishtira: I am not afraid, nor am I fond of wealth as you are. You know I cannot refuse having been challenged. I will certainly play. What are the rules?

Duryodhana: You wager jewels, precious stones, etc., and Shakuni will play on my behalf.

Yudhishtira: I have never heard of this type of game.

Shakuni: Well, it seems quite evident that you want to avoid playing, giving all these excuses of yours. If you do not want to play, you must tell us frankly.
(Bhishma enters)

Bhishma: I have heard that there is to be a game of dice to be played?

Drona: It is not a good idea to play this game, my dear children. Evil will come.

Bhishma: Listen to what your *acharya* is saying. He speaks the truth. For your own benefit, let this game not start.

Karna: How dare you speak for all of us! You are saying this just to protect the Pandavas. From the very beginning, you always favored them. You are more fond of them. Not once have you glorified Duryodhana. It is not a secret how the *acharya* and yourselves held Arjuna as very dear. As a person who is head of the Kurus, you should favor no one, and guide all without cloudy vision.

Bhishma: You make me laugh, Karna. You boast too much in front of everyone. If anyone has cloudy vision here, I'm afraid it is you. You are young and immature. You act in the mode of passion. You don't think about what you are saying.

Dhrishtadyumna: Please, my dear, do not start a quarrel. We have come to enjoy each other's company, not to fight.

Yudhishthira: O grandfather, I am compelled to play this game. I have been challenged. I cannot refuse.

Bhishma: Do what you feel is right for *dharma*. Krishna works in ways which are beyond our understanding.

Shakuni: Hmm... shall we take our places and begin? You make the wagers. We shall see if we can match you or not.

Yudhishthira: I lay my jewels and precious stones, etc., for the game.

Duryodhana: I shall then lay my own wealth against yours.

Shakuni: Good, so we have a gentleman's agreement. Now we shall begin. **(they throw dice)**

Duryodhana: You won, uncle. You won! Excellent! Excellent!

Yudhishthira: I shall lay all my gold coins.

Shakuni: Good... Here, better luck this time, my friend. **(he wins)**

Yudhishthira: I shall lay my chariots, soldiers and armies... **(Shakuni wins again)**

Vidura: Stop this insane game, O king! Have I not told you before that this will lead to a fight? Evil omens can be seen. I warn you here and now: if this game does

not stop, then it will lead to the downfall of the entire *kshatriya* race. You will suffer greatly because of this injustice caused to your brothers' sons who are sinless and pure by nature. Your son has not the power to fight the Pandavas openly, so he and his friends have to invent cheating methods to defeat them. I beseech you, O king, before it is too late. Stop this madness at once! **(silence)**

Duryodhana: My dear uncle, ever since childhood you have always been partial to the Pandavas. You never liked me. You are very ungrateful to the hand that feeds you. You are trying to kill the affection my father has for me. Do not try to force my father to change his mind. Leave us alone. Do not speak such words to my father again. Shakuni is here. He is more of a well-wisher to father and all of us than all of you put together.

Shakuni: I am afraid you have lost everything. If you have something left that you can call your own then you may wager that. I will give you all that Duryodhana has won.

Yudhishthira: I still have something I can wager.

Shakuni: You have something more? What do you have? Tell us! What could you possibly have left that we haven't already won from you?

Yudhishthira: The young and handsome Nakula is the next wager.

Shakuni: So we may carry on then. Good... here... **(wins)**

Yudhishthira: The wise Sahadeva is next...

Shakuni: Won. You have lost the sons of Madri. Why do you hesitate to wager your true brothers. Or are they so superior to the sons of Madri that you wouldn't even consider them?

Yudhishthira: Please do not say such things. Your plan is to cause dissention amongst us. Here is Arjuna, who has no equal in the world. He is my wager.

Shakuni: Good. Then you may still have a chance of winning all that you have lost... here, won!

Yudhishthira: Here is the mighty and powerful Bhima... he is my next wager.

Shakuni: Won!

Yudhishthira: I am the wager now.

Shakuni: Won!

Duryodhana: (whispering) Tell him about Draupadi.

Bhima: Duryodhana, don't you even dare to mention Draupadi, for I will smash my mace upon your wretched skull. You rogue!

Duryodhana: Bhima, calm yourself. You are no longer a free man to do what you will. You have now become a slave of the Kurus and you will remain that way.

Shakuni: So?

Yudhishtira: The favored queen of the Pandavas is my wager now.

Shakuni: Won. I now have everything of yours.

Duryodhana: You see now, Vidura, I have won everything. Now Draupadi will be our slave. Indeed this is the happiest day of my life, and I owe it entirely to you, my dear uncle.

Vidura: O shameless one. Even now it is not too late. Do not incur the all-devouring anger of the Pandavas. It is just like a deer who provokes the mighty tiger. Draupadi is not your slave. She must not be insulted. If you do not heed my words, then you will all be destroyed. Hell is already preparing herself to receive the host of the Kuru house... What can I do? They do not know what fate has in store for them.

Duryodhana: We have had enough talk from this low-born man to last ten lifetimes! Bring Draupadi here at once... What? Why do you hesitate? Are you afraid of the wrath of the Pandavas which my rotten uncle spoke of. Now go, otherwise your corpse will be fit for the dogs. **(Servant enters)**

Servant: My lord, Draupadi wants to ask this one question before she comes.

Duryodhana: What is it?

Servant: □Did Yudhishtira gamble away me first or himself?□

Duryodhana: What rubbish she speaks, timid servant! Dushasana, bring Draupadi here!

Dushasana: Yes, brother... come on, move! You belong to my brother now. You have been won in a game. You are a slave now. **(Dushasana pushes Draupadi onto stage)**

Draupadi: In this great house I see many great people: the elders of the Kurus, who are reputed to be renowned for *dharma* and righteousness from time immemorial. You are all present. Here is a man drunk with power, asking his cruel brother to drag a woman to the court, and yet you all just look on. I asked just one question but not one of you could answer me. When people like Bhishma and Drona are present here and are allowing this to take place, certainly *dharma* must have left the house of the Kurus. My question is simple. Do you all consider me a slave of this man, or am I free? **(to Bhishma)** You are said to possess all wisdom and knowledge. They say none is wiser than you.

Bhishma: I am indeed at a loss to give you a proper answer. A man cannot gamble something once he has lost himself. But then there is this consideration: a man has a right over his wife, whether he is free or not. He can call her his property even if he has lost himself. Yudhishtira knew that Shakuni was a

master of this game, and yet he willingly played against him.

Draupadi: You seem to be giving the impression that my husband played the game willingly, but your dear grandson Duryodhana and his uncle had challenged him to play. Yudhishtira was unwilling to play, but by deceitful means he was forced to do so. You knew that this was an unfair game. All of you knew. What chance does my husband have playing against the skillful Shakuni? Yet you did not stop the game. Now you chastise my husband for playing!

Duryodhana: Dushasana, let the whole court now see Draupadi's body! Pull her clothes off!

Draupadi: No! Don't touch me! **(she fights and holds onto her clothing)**

Dushasana: Stop this! You are a slave of Duryodhana! No one can stop us! You know very well that you have been lost!

Bhima: Dushasana, if you as much as touch her hair I will smash you with my bare hands! **(to Yudhishtira)** Look at what you have done! We don't mind that you gambled us all away; but now you have gambled Draupadi away!

Arjuna: Bhima, what is this action of yours? What has overcome you? Never before have you spoken to Yudhishtira like that. You have always treated him with respect.

Bhima: I did until today. I have lost all respect for him. Look at this scene! Does not your blood boil?

Arjuna: Of course, I am angry too; but can you not see that our brother is just as angry. He could burn the entire courthouse with his anger. Please do not inflict more pain upon him. The Kauravas have always wanted us to quarrel with each other. Now they are happy to see that.

Vidura: You are right. There is no righteousness in this hall. We all deserve to go to hell! Bhishma, Drona, Dhristadyumna, and all the others cannot answer your question. Is there one amongst you who can defy the courage of Duryodhana? Well, let me tell you, I feel that Draupadi has not been lost. Yudhishtira has no rights over Draupadi, since he is a slave who has no rights over anything. He is not responsible for his action. He did not even think of using Draupadi until Duryodhana suggested it. He has no right to wager Draupadi since she belongs not just to him but to all the brothers. Without the consent of his brothers, Yudhishtira played with Draupadi. She is therefore free, not a slave.

Draupadi: I am not a slave!

Duryodhana: Stop saying you are not a slave. Ask Yudhishtira the question... Go on! Go on!... She is just silent. They have not tried to release you from your slavery. Look, your lords are so eager to help you. You should now choose one of us as your husband. You shouldn't be the wife of some slaves. **(he shows his thigh to Draupadi)**

Bhima: Duryodhana, you wretched dog! I should have killed you a long time ago. My arms, my strength, my mace, my power, is all being shackled by the chains of *dharma*. But hear me, everyone in this court, while I take this solemn oath that this thigh that Duryodhana has shown □ if it is not smashed by my mace □ I will be doomed to go to hell!

Karna: Do as your brother says.

Draupadi: O please Bhishma, help me. Drona, protect me from these rogues! O king of the Kurus, how are you allowing this to happen in your presence?

Dushasana: No one will help you. Come here!

Bhima: Dushasana, listen carefully. When the war takes place I will pull your arms out of their sockets and will surely drink the blood from your heart!

Arjuna: Your words will come true. I have yet to see someone escape the wrath of Bhima. The earth will drink the blood of these four sinners □ Duryodhana,

Dushasana, Shakuni and Karna. All those present please hear as I take this oath. I will kill Karna and all his followers in the war. I will lead them all to the god of death. The Himalayas may move, the sun may swerve from its orbit, or the moon may lose its coolness, but I will never swerve from my dreaded oath!

Duryodhana: Dushasana, do not be swayed by the words of slaves. **(Dushasana tries to grab Draupadi)**

Draupadi: O my Lord Krishna, help me! Let me surrender unto You. I am Yours! **(Dushasana pulls her clothes off. He becomes exhausted as more and more cloth magically appears)**

Karna: What is this evil spell that is taking place?

Dhrishtadyumna: What has happened? What has happened?

Vikarma: The *sari* of Draupadi which Dushasana tries to disrobe seems to be endless! There is no end to it! She seems to be protected by divine nature! You must stop this at once! Come to your senses!

Dhrishtadyumna: O my foolish son, in your greediness you have insulted Draupadi, a pure soul. Your death is now certain to be soon! O Draupadi, please kindly forgive my son's wrong-doings; I will grant you any boon that you desire!

Draupadi: O king, kindly release my husbands and free them from being slaves.

Dhrishtadyumna: Yudhishtira, you and your brothers are free to go. Your kingdom and wealth shall all be returned to you.

Yudhishtira: My dear uncle, if you allow us to go then we will depart now.

Dhrishtadyumna: Yudhishtira, I am very pleased with your humility. You are wise and are truly noble. You must not remember what has taken place today. Please overlook my son's faults and return to your city.

Yudhishtira: As you wish.

Duryodhana: What madness is this, father? After all that has happened, how could you do this? Now they are more dangerous than before! Did you not see their eyes burn for revenge? Are you so naive to think they will forget what happened to Draupadi? Do you think king Drupada will stay quiet after he hears what we did to his daughter? Now Bhima and Arjuna must be thinking up ways to fulfill their oaths. We all are doomed!

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Narrator: Eventually there was a great war between the Kurus and the Pandavas and their followers. As the *Maha-Bharata* tells us, by the grace of Lord Krishna the mighty Bhima broke Duryodhana's thigh and killed him. Arjuna shot an arrow and cut Karna's head off. Such is the end result of lust, anger and greed. This concludes our drama today □ a small portion of the Vedic

literature, the *Maha-Bharata*. (***kirtan***)

The End